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File Code: 3420/2330/2470 **Date:** August 5, 2009
Route To:

Subject: Hazard tree removal at Big Hank & Devil's Elbow Campgrounds, Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District, IPNF (CFO-TR-09-19)

To: Forest Supervisor Idaho Panhandle National Forest

On May 15, 2009, Holly Kearns (FHP Plant Pathologist) met with Claire Pitner (Recreation Planner) and John Wright (Forester) of the Coeur d'Alene River Range District, Idaho Panhandle National Forests for a follow-up visit to the Big Hank Campground. Claire was marking hazard trees for removal from campgrounds prior to opening for the season. Big Hank was originally visited by Holly and Lee Pederson (FHP Entomologist) in the fall of 2008 to evaluate disease and insect issues (CFO-TR-09-02). On May 20, 2009, Holly visited the Big Hank and Devil's Elbow campgrounds with John Schwandt (FHP Plant Pathologist) to examine the felled trees.

- Trees considered an immediate hazard were flagged and later felled by the IPNF hotshot crew.
- Indian paint fungus is rampant and will impact long-term vegetation management.
- Abundant opportunities for substantial improvement of forest health conditions through vegetation management planning exist.
- Forest Health Protection may be able to provide some funding for developing vegetation management plans. Proposals for funding of FY 2010 prevention/suppression/restoration projects are due by August 28, 2009.

The attached report provides an account of observations made during these visits. If you have questions or would like further information, please do not hesitate to contact Holly (208.765.7493 or hkearns@fs.fed.us).

/s/ Peggy A. Polichio
PEGGY A. POLICHIO
Acting Director - State and Private Forestry,
Northern and Intermountain Regions

cc: Maggie Pittman

Hazard Tree Removal at
Big Hank and Devil's Elbow Campgrounds
Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District, IPNF
CFO-TR-09-19

Claire Pitner, Recreation Planner on the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District, IPNF, contacted the Coeur d'Alene Field Office of Forest Health Protection regarding identification of hazard trees at the Big Hank Campground (T52N/R3E/S29). Claire was marking hazard trees for removal from campgrounds prior to opening Memorial Day weekend. Big Hank was previously visited in the fall of 2008 at the request of Joyce Stock (District Silviculturist) to evaluate disease and insect concerns. On May 15, 2009, I met with Claire and John Wright (Forester) for a follow-up visit to Big Hank.

Upon arrival at the campground we reviewed the original trip report (CFO-TR-09-02) and examined trees with various insect and disease problems. The primary hazard tree issue in the campground is decay associated with Indian paint fungus (*Echinodontium tinctorium*). We increment cored several mature grand fir and western hemlock with Indian paint fungus conks to evaluate the soundness of their boles. I reviewed with Claire and John the general rule regarding the hazard of stem failure associated with internal decay. Trees with greater than 60% of their radius made up of sound wood are considered a low hazard for stem failure, those with 30-60% of radius in sound wood represent a moderate hazard, and those with less than 30% of the radius in sound wood represent a high hazard (Wagener 1963). Unfortunately, heartwood decay is usually most severe nearest the conks, and coring at the base of the tree likely does not provide an accurate indication of the amount of internal decay further up the bole where the majority of conks were located. However, we were able to core several trees with conks located along the entire bole.

I also pointed out indicators of Armillaria root disease and trees with obvious physical defects including multiple tops, dead tops, and large broken branches in cottonwoods. Trees considered an immediate hazard, including two large cottonwood with previously broken out branches and trees with dead tops overhanging campground fixtures, were flagged and later felled by the IPNF hotshot crew.

On May 20, 2009, I visited the Big Hank and Devil's Elbow campgrounds with John Schwandt (FHP Plant Pathologist) to examine the felled trees and take pictures. Many trees had very obvious decay columns with less than 30% sound rind justifying the need for removal (Figures 1-5).

At Devil's Elbow Campground (T51N/R3E/S14) a few very large western white pine were removed near the group campsite. One tree was dead with no indication of either heartwood or root decay. Other western white pine were cut because of dead tops. These trees were very sound and would have likely remained standing for a long time. Dead trees and dead tops present less of sail area for wind and are more likely to fail with heavy snow loads rather than wind. It is not always necessary to remove the entire bole of dead trees that have no indication of decay or root disease. Leaving such trees or topping them to produce shorter snags creates no immediate hazard and provides some structural diversity and potential wildlife habitat to the site.

Figure 5. Large cottonwood with extensive internal decay removed from the Big Hank Campground.

Vegetation Management Planning

If all the grand fir and western hemlock with decay conks were removed from the Big Hank Campground, the majority of the large overstory trees would be removed. However, there are many trees occupying the mid-canopy and understory layers that could continue to provide a forested atmosphere. Unfortunately, these and the great majority of the regeneration are grand fir and western hemlock, species that are likely already infected with Indian paint fungus. Species that are currently present in small amounts, but should be emphasized in long-term management due to their tolerance of